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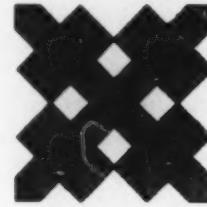
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ABSTRACT

The Young Adults Employment Supports Project (YES) of Matrix Research Institute (MRI) has been identified as an exemplary school-to-work program that includes students with disabilities. The program serves young persons with serious emotional disorders between the ages of 17-22 throughout Philadelphia who are preparing to exit special education settings. This vocational demonstration and research project provides educational and vocational supports to youth with emotional disabilities in their transition from school to work by helping students attain and maintain employment and access services that were previously unavailable to them. YES's four guiding principles are as follows: member empowerment, family involvement, strong work ethics, and collaboration. The project has three phases: planning and assessment; employment training, job searching and placement, job coaching, and Job Club at MRI; and support through education, counseling, and advocacy services. Collaboration among MRI, the local clubhouse, the Philadelphia School District, Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Office of Mental Health provides students, who do not regularly attend school, with opportunities to gain various job skills while gaining academic credit to graduate from high school. (YLB)

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YES
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Mission/Goals

To provide educational and vocational supports to youth with emotional disabilities in their transition from school to work. The project aims to (a) assist students and their families in utilizing services available in the community, (b) facilitate student and family investment in transition planning, (c) encourage the development of a strong work ethic, (d) help students develop vocational maturity and a better quality of life, (e) ensure that students have the basic vocational survival skills, and (f) develop a strong interagency collaboration.

Organization/Program Context

Matrix Research Institute (MRI) is a nonprofit research and training center that provides direct service, consultation and research into systems, program evaluation, professional training, human resource development, and public education in various disability areas. The Young Adults Employment Supports Project (YES) is a vocational demonstration and research project of MRI. YES helps students attain and maintain employment and access services that were previously unavailable to them. The four guiding principles of YES are member empowerment, family involvement, strong work ethics, and collaboration.

Description

There are three phases of the YES project.

Phase I: Planning and Assessment. MRI staff and school personnel meet with students and their families and to present the YES project. Prospective participants are identified through a coordinated effort by the transition staff of the Special Education Department of the Philadelphia School System and the staff of the YES project. This effort includes several meetings with a team made up of the student, family, school personnel, representatives from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Mental Health Services, and others to develop an Individualized Transition Plan (ITP). The ITP addresses the individual's strengths and interests as well as plans for further education, housing, and job training. A trusting and respectable relationship is carefully established between YES counselors, the student, and his or her family.

Phase II: Training and Job Placement. The YES Project offers many options for employment training and job searching.

Job Training. Several vocational training programs are offered by the Community Mental Health Center, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, and contracted service providers. The training includes prevocational work adjustment and specialized training for food service, clerical, or janitorial jobs. On an individual basis, students receive training in technical schools or

Contact Person

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Community Setting

Philadelphia is a major metropolitan, residential and academic community with a population of over 1.5 million people.

Population Served

Young persons with serious emotional disorders between the ages of 17-22 throughout the city of Philadelphia who are preparing to exit special education settings.

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Program Staff

Services Director

- Oversees all aspects of the program
- Communicates with the school district, other municipal offices, families, and other educators
- Develops products regarding the project
- Evaluates the services of the project

Project Director

- Supervises the staff of the project
- Communicates and collaborates with employers, training programs, families, and educators
- Conducts outreach concerning the project and general issues for young persons with SED

Employment Supports Counselors

- Provides information about the project to educators, parents, and young adults
- Assists participants in accessing appropriate services and jobs
- Facilitates Job Club activities
- Provides training to potential and participating employers
- Serves as a mentor, a job coach, and guidance counselor to students

post secondary educational institutions.

Job Placement. Job opportunities are provided in the areas of landscaping, construction, food service, and retail.

Job Coaching. YES helps to coordinate various models of employment including transitional employment and supported employment. In addition, vocational support is provided through Club Houses and other models operating within many of the community mental health/mental retardation centers in Philadelphia. Job coaching is provided as needed. The job coach examines the social and vocational requirements of the job and works to ensure that students have the necessary social skills and the abilities to perform the job.

Job Club, Matrix Research Institute (MRI). The Job Club provides vocational services primarily for youth reluctant to enter vocational training, supported employment, or other employment related services as well as to those ineligible for funded vocational services. These services include one-to-one counseling and a Job Club focus on the development of motivation to work, vocational goals, and social skills. YES counselors assist participants in identifying the importance of work, their vocational strengths, and the barriers to work and ways to overcome them. They provide information about potential employers, resume preparation, preparing for an interview using mock interview techniques, and assistance with logistics such as transportation, clothing, and scheduling interviews. Additionally, participants create their own job bank by bringing in at least one "help wanted" advertisement, employer phone number, or an application from an employer who has posted a "help wanted" sign. This helps the participants gain the confidence and skills to apply for jobs on their own.

Phase III: Support and Sustain. YES provides a comprehensive range of education, counseling, and advocacy services to assist individuals in establishing and maintaining long-term employment by regular contact, peer support groups, on-site support, skills groups, and topical lectures. All recently employed individuals prepare an Individualized Service Plan (ISP) in collaboration with their YES counselor. The ISP includes assessments of participants regarding their work and social skills, measurable goals, objectives, time frames, and persons responsible for the achievement of goals. The ISP is reviewed and updated every six months.

Exemplary School-to-Work Components

Connecting Activities

Collaboration between MRI, the local clubhouse, the "Open Door," operated by COMHAR, Inc., the Philadelphia School District, the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Office of Mental Health provides students, who regularly do not attend school, with opportunities to gain various job skills while gaining academic credit to graduate from high school. This collaborative effort also helps students receive information and services that would otherwise be unavailable to them.

What Makes it Work?

- Comprehensive and individualized services are adapted to the student's individual needs, strengths, and circumstances with a strong involvement by students and their families in all aspects of decision making.
- The work environment is stable and matches the student's interests and competencies.
- The staff are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and provide unconditional support to students. There is a strong relationship between the counselor and the student.
- Focus on skill-development and outcomes which identify an individual's skills, strengths, and deficits and provides opportunities to learn and practice new skills in real environments.
- Program and staff policies emphasize valuing youth and their struggles to achieve adulthood along with a strong belief that youth can be successful.

Raymond's Story

Raymond Rivera is a 20 year old Hispanic male with an emotional/behavioral disability. His disability along with personal issues including his socioeconomic background, and family dynamics have greatly contributed to Raymond experiencing difficulty in his academic performance and general success in life.

Raymond enrolled in YES in 1996. YES assisted him in getting a job in construction because he had interest and prior experience in this profession working with his father. His performance on the job was outstanding and everybody liked him. Because of his success on the job, Raymond began training in building and maintenance at the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC), a program funded through the Philadelphia Office of Mental Health. Through the OIC, Raymond received training in basic carpentry, electrical plumbing, and trowel trades. He did very well at OIC and enrolled in the Mayor's Literacy Program, a city-funded program that assists students in getting their GED.

Raymond is very happy with the direction of his life and so is his family. When asked what helped him the most, Raymond responded that the time the YES counselors spent with him and his family believing in him were critical and helped him to make positive choices in his life.

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For Further Information



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School-to-work is described in the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994.

School to work is . . .

*A **System** built to provide opportunities for students to learn about and experience work while in school.*

***Educational Reform** that addresses the need for students to gain work experience and workplace skills while in school.*

***Partnerships** between schools, employers and communities.*

*For **All Students**, kindergarten through 12th grade.*

School-to-Work Outreach Project Overview

The School-to-Work Outreach Project at the Institute on Community Integration (UAP) is a nationwide, three year project funded by the U.S. Department of Education. This project assists and supports school-to-work initiatives through the identification of exemplary school-to-work models/practices/strategies that include students with disabilities. Exemplary school-to-work models/practices/strategies are identified through a five step selection process:

- **Nomination**
- **Application**
- **Reference**
- **Application Review**
- **Final Review and Selection**

Identification Criteria and School-to-Work Priority Areas, established by the School-to-Work Outreach Project, guide the application review.

Profiles of the identified models/practices/strategies are available upon request. Adoption and replication of these exemplary school-to-work activities is encouraged and technical assistance is available to schools and organizations interested in implementing these models/practices/strategies or improving existing school-to-work activities and systems. Contact the School-to-Work Outreach Project at the above address for further information.

Basic Elements of School-to-Work

School-based Learning - Instruction and experiences based on academic and occupational standards.

Work-based Learning - Workplace experience, structured training, mentoring and apprenticeships at job sites.

Connecting Activities - A variety of activities that build and maintain bridges between school, work and other adult environments.

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